

# **U.S. Army World War II Corps Commanders:**

## **A Composite Biography**

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Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE <b>1989</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-1989 to 00-00-1989</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>U.S. Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Bibliography</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>Army Combined Arms Center, Combat Studies Institute, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 66027</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>25</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Berlin, Robert H. (Robert Harry), 1946-  
U.S. Army World War II corps commanders : a composite biography /  
Robert H. Berlin.

p. cm.

1. World War, 1939-1945—Biography. 2. Generals—United States—  
Biography. 3. Command of troops—History—20th century. 4. United  
States. Army—Biography. I. Title. II. Title: US Army World War  
II corps commanders.

D769.1.B48 1989

940.54'12'730922—dc20

89-15912

CIP

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# United States Army World War II Corps Commanders: A Composite Biography



Robert H. Berlin

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**T**HE United States Army corps commander in World War II was the highest-level officer who was engaged in battle at the front and who concentrated on high-level tactics. Leaving administrative matters largely at army level, he coordinated the use of combined arms on the battlefield. He was, as one general describes him, "the last man towards the rear who directs tactical fire on the enemy. He is the commander who conducts the battle."<sup>1</sup>

The corps commander was responsible for coordinating and directing the effort of the corps as a combined arms whole. According to 1942 *Field Service Regulations for Larger Units*, the corps commander left the details of executing his operational plan to division commanders. In combat, he influenced the outcome of the battle by maintaining close contact with the leading divisions and coordinating the use of

This paper was originally presented at the 1988 Organization of American Historians Annual Meeting. I wish to thank the session participants: Roger J. Spiller, Larry I. Bland, Peter Maslowski, and Lee Kennett for their helpful comments. The paper also benefited from review by Edward J. Drea, Timothy K. Nenninger, Christopher R. Gabel, and Edward M. Coffman.

1. Major General Wade H. Haislip, "Corps in Combat," unpagged and undated lecture given at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff School and at the Air University, Haislip Papers, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania (hereafter cited as USAMHI).

forces. His task, according to doctrine, was to follow the progress of battle, adjust or modify assigned missions of subordinate elements, and make "such changes in zones of action and objectives as may be necessary to take full advantage of enemy weaknesses, to exploit those weaknesses, and defeat decisively the hostile force."<sup>2</sup>

General Matthew B. Ridgway, who successfully commanded at both the division and corps level during World War II, describes in his memoirs certain characteristics of the World War II U.S. Army corps commander:

He is responsible for a large sector of a battle area, and all he must worry about in that zone is fighting. He must be a man of great flexibility of mind, for he may be fighting six divisions one day and one division the next as the higher commanders transfer divisions to and from his corps. He must be a man of tremendous physical stamina, too, for his battle zone may cover a front of one hundred miles or more, with a depth of fifty to sixty miles, and by plane and jeep he must cover this area, day and night, anticipating where the hardest fighting is to come, and being there in person, ready to help his division commanders in any way he can.<sup>3</sup>

For the U.S. Army in World War II "the corps was the key headquarters for employing all combat elements in proper tactical combinations."<sup>4</sup> Situated below army and above division in the hierarchy of command, the corps consisted essentially of a commander and his staff, headquarters units, and certain organic elements. The corps controlled a varying number of divisions. While the U.S. Army World War II infantry division was standardized and usually included about fifteen thousand men, the corps, as one commander described it, was an amorphous, elastic tactical unit that "expands and contracts according to the allocation of troops from higher headquarters based on the enemy, the terrain and the contemplated missions."<sup>5</sup>

Combat units moved from one corps to another at the discretion of the army commander. In addition, the corps controlled pools of non-

2. U.S. War Department, FM 100-15, *Field Service Regulations: Larger Units* (Washington: GPO, 29 June 1942), 56-65.

3. Matthew B. Ridgway, *Soldier: The Memoirs of Matthew B. Ridgway* (New York: Harper, 1956), 18.

4. Kent Roberts Greenfield, Robert R. Palmer, and Bell I. Wiley, *The Organization of Ground Combat Troops*, U.S. Army in World War II (Washington: GPO, 1947), 365.

5. Lieutenant General Alvan C. Gillem, "Action of a Corps," lecture presented at Fort Benning, Georgia, 3 March 1948, Box 5, Gillem Papers, USAMHI.

divisional combat units, such as corps artillery, engineers, tanks, and tank destroyers, which were distributed to divisions as dictated by need and availability. As part of a multi-corps army, the corps had few administrative functions. In essence, "the corps became the key headquarters for employing all combat elements in proper tactical combinations."<sup>6</sup>

Twenty-two U.S. Army corps were actively engaged in combat operations at some time during World War II.<sup>7</sup> Successful corps command made a significant, yet largely unrecognized, contribution to Allied victory in World War II. Thirty-four U.S. Army general officers commanded these corps in battle. For a professional officer, corps command was the ultimate position of tactical leadership. Corps commanders who moved on to higher military positions during or after the war, such as Omar N. Bradley, George S. Patton, Jr., J. Lawton Collins, and Matthew B. Ridgway, are well known to military historians, and many have published their memoirs. However, the majority of corps commanders have evoked little historical interest. Innis P. Swift led First Corps in the Pacific for nearly a year and a half, Alvan C. Gillem led Thirteenth Corps for twenty-two months in the European Theater of Operations (ETO), and Geoffrey Keyes commanded Second Corps during twenty-one months of combat in Italy. Despite such accomplishments, these distinguished officers are relatively unknown.

This study describes and assesses the common background of World War II corps commanders from their entrance on active duty during 1904-17 through the end of World War II. My hypothesis is that these officers developed common professional skills and abilities. Early service with troops; education at the Command and General Staff School; and tours as instructors, staff officers, and commanders during the interwar years provided a career path that ably prepared most of these officers for high-level command. However, such preparation did not in itself enable these officers to attain their positions, and thus this paper also examines how the U.S. Army selected corps commanders during World War II. Finally, this paper provides a brief evaluation of those corps commanders who were relieved and those who were promoted.

6. FM 100-15 (1942), 56-57; Greenfield, Palmer, and Wiley, *Organization*, 365.

7. U.S. Adjutant General's Office, General Officer Management Office, *Alphabetical Rosters for World War II Generals* (Washington: The Pentagon, n.d.); and Shelby L. Stanton, *Order of Battle, U.S. Army, World War II* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1984), 6.

The thirty-four commanders who led corps in World War II combat were born between 1882 and 1896. The eldest was Innis P. Swift, and the youngest corps commander was J. Lawton Collins. In between, one was born in 1883, one in 1885, four in 1886, five in 1888, six in 1889, three in 1890, two in 1891, three in 1892, four in 1893, one in 1894, and two in 1895.<sup>8</sup> They were born in twenty-four states—four in Virginia, three in Indiana, and the remaining states had no more than two per state. Their fathers followed diverse occupations, including farming, ranching, business, law, and medicine. Some came from wealthy households, others were orphans raised by relatives.

Seven of the thirty-four corps commanders—Lloyd R. Fredendall, S. LeRoy Irwin, Geoffrey Keyes, Alexander M. Patch, Matthew B. Ridgway, Franklin C. Sibert, and Innis P. Swift—had fathers on active duty in the U.S. Army at the time of their birth. The fathers of Irwin, Ridgway, Sibert, and Swift were graduates of the U.S. Military Academy. Sibert's father was a general officer. Swift's grandfather was an academy graduate, and his great-grandfather had been a general officer. Clearly, however, these were the exceptions, and if the corps commanders are an indication, high command in the U.S. Army during World War II was not determined by state of origin or father's occupation.<sup>9</sup>

Of greater significance were military education, experience, and successful performance of duty as evaluated by officer efficiency reports. Twenty-four of the thirty-four future corps commanders attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, twenty-three graduating. The twenty-fourth, Lloyd R. Fredendall was dismissed in both 1902 and

8. See Table 1 for corps commanders listed by date of birth.

9. Biographical data on these officers has been compiled from Military Personnel Records Jackets (201 Files originally kept by the Adjutant General's Office) at the National Personnel Records Center, National Archives and Records Administration, St. Louis, Missouri, hereafter cited as NPRC. The NPRC does not have all corps commanders' records. A fire at the NPRC on 12 July 1973 destroyed many military records. Records of living and recently deceased officers are still controlled by the army and are closed. Published sources of biographical data used in this study include George Washington Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., From Its Establishment, in 1802, to 1890*, 3d ed., rev. and enlarged, 3 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1891), with *Supplements, 1890-1950*, 6 vols. (West Point, N.Y.: Association of Graduates, United States Military Academy, 1900- ); Roger J. Spiller, ed., *Dictionary of American Military Biography*, 3 vols. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984); *Webster's American Military Biographies* (Springfield, Mass.: G. and C. Merriam Company, 1978). The *Webster's* volume has been republished in paperback and carries the following official bibliographic description: Robert McHenry, ed., *Webster's American Military Biographies* (New York: Dover, 1984).

1903 for failing mathematics.<sup>10</sup> At least four officers had a year or more of higher education before entering the military academy.

The majority of academy graduates who attained corps command during World War II were in the classes of 1909 through 1917. The classes of 1912 and 1913 each produced four, and three each came from the classes of 1910, 1915, and 1917. In their memoirs, these officers speak highly of their West Point experiences. Major General Charles H. Corlett recalled the trials of his plebe year and noted that "aside from the academic and military knowledge acquired, the fixed and unalterable code became part of us."<sup>11</sup> Besides an education and a set of ethics, West Point students acquired reputations that remained with them throughout their careers.

The class yearbook, *The Howitzer*, records that Ernest J. Dawley was "a quiet lad that one seldom sees or hears of." Omar Bradley, class of 1915, was a great baseball player whose "most promising characteristic is 'getting there,' and if he keeps up the clip he's started, some of us will some day be bragging to our grandchildren that 'sure, General Bradley was a classmate of mine.'" The 1917 *Howitzer* observed that typical of the cadet life of J. Lawton Collins was "first, concentration and decision, second, rapid and hearty action."<sup>12</sup> In terms of class standing, these future generals were an average lot. Seven graduated in the top third and seven in the lower third of their classes. The highest class standing was that of Charles P. Hall who stood 22d in the class of 1911. Corlett graduated 81st of 93 in the 1913 class, and Swift stood 115th of 124 in the 1904 class. If these officers are any indication, there was little correlation between academic success at West Point and attaining corps command.

Other military and civilian schools are also represented in the education of World War II corps commanders. Edward H. Brooks graduated from Norwich University, and Ernest Harmon studied there for a year before entering the military academy. Leonard T. Gerow was a 1911 graduate of the Virginia Military Institute, and Manton S. Eddy gradu-

10. Philip D. Jones, "Lloyd Ralston Fredendall," in *Dictionary of American Military Biography*, 1:350. Fredendall attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, passed an examination for a commission in 1906, and entered the army in early 1907.

11. *Cowboy Pete: An Autobiography of Major General Charles H. Corlett*, ed. William Farrington (Santa Fe, N.M.: Sleeping Fox Publishers, [1974]), 25. Others echo these comments: see Joseph Lawton Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 6.

12. United States Military Academy, *The Howitzer* (West Point, N.Y., 1910- : New York, 19- ), 1910, 59; 1915, 55; and 1917, 50.



Table 1

## U.S. Army World War II Combat Corps Commanders

<i>Birth Date</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Birth Date</i>	<i>Name</i>
7 Feb 82	Swift, Innis P.	30 Dec 89	Cook, Gilbert R.
28 Dec 83	Fredendall, Lloyd R.	14 Jan 90	Lucas, John P.
11 Nov 85	Patton, George S., Jr.	4 Apr 90	McLain, Raymond S.
17 Feb 86	Dawley, Ernest J.	2 Dec 90	Crittenberger, Willis D.
9 Mar 86	Eichelberger, Robert L.	3 Jan 91	Sibert, Franklin C.
22 Oct 86	Griswold, Oscar	10 Mar 91	Anderson, John B.
12 Dec 86	Hall, Charles P.	11 Jan 92	Milburn, Frank W.
7 Jan 88	Millikin, John	19 Mar 92	Van Fleet, James A.
13 Jul 88	Gerow, Leonard T.	16 May 92	Eddy, Manton S.
8 Aug 88	Gillem, Alvan C.	12 Feb 93	Bradley, Omar N.
30 Oct 88	Keyes, Geoffrey	23 Mar 93	Irwin, S. LeRoy
24 Nov 88	Huebner, Clarence R.	25 Apr 93	Brooks, Edward H.
9 Jul 89	Haislip, Wade H.	12 Jun 93	Hodge, John R.
31 Jul 89	Corlett, Charles H.	26 Feb 94	Harmon, Ernest N.
12 Oct 89	Middleton, Troy H.	9 Jan 95	Truscott, Lucian K., Jr.
23 Nov 89	Patch, Alexander M.	3 Mar 95	Ridgway, Matthew B.
3 Dec 89	Walker, Walton H.	1 May 96	Collins, J. Lawton

ated from Shattuck Military School. Five—including Troy H. Middleton, who graduated from the Mississippi Agricultural and Mechanical College in 1909, and Lucian Truscott, who attended the Cleveland Teachers Institute—attended civilian colleges. Only one corps commander, Oklahoma National Guardsman Raymond S. McLain, did not receive some form of higher education.<sup>13</sup>

The infantryman was the backbone of the World War II army, so it should not be surprising that twenty-two of these leaders were assigned to the infantry. Ten were initially cavalymen and two joined the field artillery. Three officers—S. LeRoy Irwin, Edward H. Brooks, and John P. Lucas—transferred from cavalry to field artillery between 1917 and 1920. Service with field artillery units prior to or during World War I evidently prompted these branch transfers. J. Lawton Collins recalled that he requested assignment to the infantry upon graduation from West Point and “never regretted the choice.” Graduating in 1917, Collins requested a regiment that he thought would be sent overseas. To his

13. Military Personnel Records Jackets, NPRC. McLain, the only National Guardsman to command a corps, left school after the sixth grade.

disappointment, the regiment remained in the United States throughout the war, and he did not get to Europe until after the armistice.<sup>14</sup>

The relationship between combat experience as a junior officer and later success as a high-level commander is of both historic and current interest. Unlike other professionals, the officer encounters his reason for existence—armed combat—infrequently. Twenty-three of the thirty-four subjects of this study served in the American Expeditionary Forces in France. Sixteen of these were in combat; four—including Manton S. Eddy, George S. Patton, Jr., John P. Lucas, and Clarence R. Huebner—were wounded. Huebner, who was wounded three times, began the war as a captain and company commander; by October 1918, he was a lieutenant colonel in command of an infantry regiment. His World War I service earned him two Distinguished Service Crosses and the Distinguished Service Medal.<sup>15</sup>

Others who were in combat in World War I not only gained combat experience but attained reputations which lived with them after the war. In September and October 1918 in the Meuse-Argonne, Troy H. Middleton showed "the fine tactical intuition and calmness under fire that were the hallmarks of his career."<sup>16</sup> By war's end, he was the youngest colonel in the A.E.F.<sup>17</sup> Manton S. Eddy participated in the Aisne-Marne offensive and in the Meuse-Argonne, ending the war in command of a machine-gun battalion. Alexander M. Patch commanded a machine-gun battalion, was director of the A.E.F. machine-gun school, and during the Meuse-Argonne fighting, led an infantry battalion.<sup>18</sup> Ernest N. Harmon led his cavalry troop on successful reconnoitering missions against the Germans, and George S. Patton, Jr., is recognized as "the combat leader of the American tankers" of World War I.<sup>19</sup>

14. Collins, *Lightning Joe*, 7.

15. On Huebner, see Martin Blumenson and James L. Stokesbury, *Masters of the Art of Command* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), 164-72; and Major R. J. Rogers, "A Study of Leadership in the First Infantry Division During World War II: Terry De La Mesa Allen and Clarence Ralph Huebner" (Master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1965).

16. Mark M. Lowenthal, "Troy H. Middleton," in *Dictionary of American Military Biography*, 2:765.

17. *Ibid.*; and Frank James Price, *Troy H. Middleton: A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974).

18. Manton S. Eddy, Military Personnel Records Jacket, NPRC. On Patch see Truman R. Strobridge and Bernard C. Nalty, "From the South Pass to the Brenner Pass: General Alexander M. Patch," *Military Review* 61 (June 1981): 41-48.

19. Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 282, 313.

Of the thirty-four officers in this study, seven were in France but not in direct combat. Several served in significant staff positions. Charles H. Corlett was executive officer for the chief signal officer of the A.E.F. and, later, was his director of supplies. Leonard T. Gerow also served on the signal corps staff in France. Wade H. Haislip was secretary of the general staff for Fifth Corps. Innis P. Swift held several staff positions related to personnel matters. Ernest J. Dawley was executive officer of the Saumur Artillery School in France.<sup>20</sup>

Robert L. Eichelberger and Alvan C. Gillem served with the American Expeditionary Forces in Siberia—Eichelberger for nineteen months and Gillem for eight. Eichelberger, who served as assistant chief of staff and later as chief intelligence officer, observed the rival factions in their contest for power and also witnessed most of the fighting in which American soldiers were engaged. For Eichelberger, the experience of combat, his observations of Japanese soldiers, and his study of leadership were of great future value when, as a corps and army commander, he faced the challenges of World War II in the Pacific.<sup>21</sup>

To their dismay, nine of the future corps commanders did not participate in World War I either in France or Siberia. Keyes and Crittenberger were instructors at the military academy during the war, while Irwin taught at the Field Artillery School. Ridgway and Truscott served in Texas and Arizona along the Mexican border, while Bradley trained troops in Washington state. Collins served with troops in New York state and did not go to France until 1919. Frank W. Milburn served in the Canal Zone, and Oscar W. Griswold, as an aide to a major general, accompanied him on an inspection tour of British, French, and American forces on the Western Front in France from November 1917 to February 1918.<sup>22</sup> Obviously, there were ways to gain experience from World War I without serving at the front.

Nonetheless, over one-half of the officers in this study were in battle during World War I. But although valuable, this experience did not prove to be critical for future advancement and selection for high-level command. Omar Bradley, whose initial combat assignment was as a corps commander in North Africa and Sicily, performed brilliantly

20. Military Personnel Records Jackets, NPRC; and Cullum, *Biographical Register*.

21. Robert L. Eichelberger, *Dear Miss Em: General Eichelberger's War in the Pacific, 1942-1945*, ed. Jay Luvaas (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1972), 7-11.

22. Military Personnel Records Jackets, NPRC; Cullum, *Biographical Register* and R. H. D., "Oscar Woolverton Griswold, obituary, *Assembly* 19 (Fall 1960): 82.

without having participated in combat during World War I.<sup>23</sup> The key to advancement and preparation for the demands of high-level leadership positions during World War II is not necessarily found in World War I battlefield service.

The interwar period following the demobilization of the 1920s gave officers time to study and teach at professional military schools. These schools laid the foundation for corps command in World War II. Between 1922 and 1930, thirty of the thirty-four corps commanders attended officer advanced courses at the Infantry, Cavalry, and Field Artillery schools at Forts Benning, Riley, and Sill. These courses provided instruction and practical exercises directed to advancing an officer's branch expertise. Officers also made important contacts with contemporaries and superiors who would influence their careers. Notable, of course, is the connection several of them established with George C. Marshall, the future chief of staff of the army, who was assistant commandant at the Infantry School from November 1927 to June 1932. Marshall's chief biographer has declared that "when in 1940 and 1941 the Chief of Staff looked for division and corps commanders, he knew intimately scores of officers who had worked with him at Benning and who valued the same essentials of battle leadership."<sup>24</sup> Among them were Bradley, Collins, Ridgway, Van Fleet, Huebner, Eddy, and Cook, all of whom had studied or taught with Marshall at Fort Benning.

Among the group, seventeen were graduates of the Infantry Advanced Course, eight the Artillery Course, and seven the Cavalry Course. Two officers, Collins and Walker, were graduates of both the Infantry and Artillery Courses. Only four officers—Corlett, Eichelberger, Gilem, and Griswold—did not attend an advanced course between the world wars.

After the advanced branch course, the next level on the pyramid of U.S. Army professional military education was the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. During the interwar period, instruction at Leavenworth concentrated on tactics and operations using practical exercises and problem solving as the instructional methodology. Between 1930 and 1936, the Command and General Staff School (C.G.S.S.) had a two-year program that included additional instruction on corps and army-level operations. The school aimed to

23. This subject is ably, though briefly, explored in Martin Blumenson, "World War I: Proving Ground for World War II?" *Army* 31 (March 1981): 48-56. Blumenson cites the case of Bradley.

24. Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall*, vol. 1, *Education of a General, 1880-1939* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), 269.

prepare officers for command and staff duties at the division and corps levels.<sup>25</sup>

Thirty-three of the thirty-four U.S. Army World War II combat corps commanders were Leavenworth graduates. Of these, twenty-four graduated from the one-year course between 1923 and 1929, and eight from the two-year course between 1930 and 1936. Raymond S. McLain attended a three-month National Guard officers course at Leavenworth in 1938. Only one of the group, James A. Van Fleet, did not attend Leavenworth at all.<sup>26</sup> Van Fleet claims he did not attend C.G.S.S. because he was needed at the University of Florida where he was professor of military science and tactics—and the football coach.<sup>27</sup>

The instruction at Leavenworth provided the officers in this study with an understanding of common staff procedures and tactical doctrine. This common knowledge was both an essential part of their military education and a professional tool that enhanced the flexibility of World War II division and corps operations.<sup>28</sup> According to J. Lawton Collins, who graduated in 1933, "for the Army as a whole, the courses at the Command and General Staff School were probably the most important in the entire system of military education, and were to prove invaluable in World War II."<sup>29</sup> Thirteen of the group graduated near the top of their classes and were honor or distinguished graduates. Only two of the thirty-three—Corlett and Griswold—graduated in the lower half of their classes at Leavenworth.<sup>30</sup> (Table 2 lists the year each commander graduated and his class standing.)

25. Timothy K. Nenninger, "The Command and General Staff School, 1919-40," unpublished manuscript, Combat Studies Institute, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1988.

26. Military Personnel Records Jackets, NPRC; and Cullum, *Biographical Register*.

27. General James A. Van Fleet, interview with Lieutenant Colonel Bruce Williams, 20 January 1973, Oral History Collections, USAMHI.

28. In his memoirs, one corps commander observed, "A military historian recently asked me how the United States, indifferent and even contemptuous of the military in peacetime, had been able to produce a group of generals proficient enough to lead armies successfully against German might. . . . I am now convinced that the intensive and imaginative training at the Command and General Staff College had a great deal to do with it." Ernest N. Harmon with Milton MacKaye and William Ross MacKaye, *Combat Commander: Autobiography of a Soldier* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 49-50.

29. Collins, *Lightning Joe*, 57.

30. Class records of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff School in the Registrar's Office, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; and Military Personnel Records Jackets, NPRC.

Table 2

**Corps Commanders' Education and Teaching Experiences  
at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff School**

Name	CGSS Graduate	Year Course	Class Standing	Faculty Member
Anderson	1925	1	20/258	1934-38
Bradley	1929	1	1/88	
Brooks	1934	2	13/118	1937-39
Collins	1933	2	22/125	
Cook	1925	1	38/258	1939-41
Corlett	1923	1	100/151	1927-31
Crittenberger	1925	1	27/258	
Dawley	1927	1	80/201	
Eddy	1934	2	49/118	1934-38
Eichelberger	1926	1	27/245	1926-29
Fredendall	1923	1	30/151	
Gerow	1926	1	11/245	
Gillem	1923	1	57/151	
Griswold	1925	1	189/258	
Haislip	1925	1	67/258	1932-36
Hall	1925	1	43/258	
Harmon	1933	2	14/125	
Hodge	1934	2	5/118	
Huebner	1925	1	6/258	1929-33
Irwin	1927	1	41/201	
Keyes	1926	1	84/245	
Lucas	1924	1	78/247	
McLain	1938*	NA	18/40	
Middleton	1924	1	8/240	1924-28
Milburn	1933	2	18/125	1934-38
Millikin	1926	1	30/245	1926-30
Patch	1925	1	30/258	
Patton	1923	1	25/248	
Ridgway	1935	2	46/118	
Sibert	1925	1	28/258	1925-28
Swift	1923	1	123/151	1923-29
Truscott	1936	2	32/121	1936-40
Van Fleet	No			
Walker	1926	1	117/245	

\* Three-month National Guard officers course.

The Army War College in Washington, D.C., was another step on the ladder to corps command in World War II. Students at the Army War College studied how to prepare for and conduct war and engaged as well in an analytical study of historical campaigns. The War College emphasized educating officers for both general staff service and higher command. There were no class standings, and work was done by student committees.<sup>31</sup> Corps command during World War II was an intellectually demanding job; classroom education at the War College, therefore, was valuable preparation for the task. Between 1926 and 1938, twenty-nine of the thirty-four officers graduated from the Army War College. Their formal professional education was now nearly complete.<sup>32</sup>

One reason for the vitality of interwar professional military education was the quality of instructors. During the interwar period, every one of the Regular Army officers in this study served as an instructor somewhere in the army educational system. Between the two world wars, eleven officers served as instructors at the military academy, fourteen were instructors at the Infantry School, five taught at the Cavalry School, three served at the Field Artillery School, and two were on the faculty of the Coast Artillery School. Fourteen were instructors at the Command and General Staff School. Fifteen had tours at colleges and universities as R.O.T.C. professors of military science and tactics. One was an instructor at the Army War College. These figures do not include multiple tours, several of which occurred at the Infantry School and R.O.T.C. schools. World War II corps commanders recognized the connection between teaching and military command.<sup>33</sup> They used their tours of duty as instructors to continue their education and development.

During the interwar period, twenty-five corps commanders spent over ten years in the classroom either as students or instructors. For example, following World War I, Troy Middleton spent two years on the

31. Harry P. Ball, *Of Responsible Command: A History of the U.S. Army War College* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Alumni Association of the United States Army War College, 1983), 212-19.

32. Military Personnel Records Jackets, NPRC; and Cullum, *Biographical Register*. Eddy, McClain, Milburn, Truscott, and Van Fleet did not attend the Army War College. Collins and Swift were also graduates of the Army Industrial College.

33. Military Personnel Records Jackets, NPRC. As instructors, these officers could influence each other. While Troy Middleton was an instructor at the Command and General Staff School from 1924 to 1928, he taught seventeen of the thirty-four corps commanders. According to his biographer, "At one time in World War II, every corps commander in Europe had been a student under Middleton at the Command and General Staff School." Price, *Middleton*, 91.

Infantry School faculty; a year as a student; another year on the Infantry Board; yet another year as a student, this time at C.G.S.S.; four years on the faculty at Leavenworth; and a year at the Army War College.<sup>34</sup> From 1921 to 1939, Edward H. Brooks was a student at the Artillery School, an instructor at the Artillery School for more than four years, a student at C.G.S.S., a professor of military science and tactics at Harvard University for two years, a student at the Army War College, and ultimately an instructor at Leavenworth for two years. During this eighteen-year period, Brooks was outside the classroom for only one-third of the time—about six years—when he commanded artillery batteries in the Philippines and at Fort Riley.<sup>35</sup>

Certainly, the size of the U.S. Army during the interwar period governed the number of available command and staff assignments and steered officers into the classroom. In 1926, the army totaled less than 135,000 officers and men, and it was not until 1938 that the army had over 185,000. In 1938, there were still fewer than 14,000 officers.<sup>36</sup> However, my study of the career patterns of these thirty-four officers indicates that instructor duty during the interwar period was career enhancing. A review of officer efficiency reports reveals a conscientious effort by these officers to perform instructor duties with dedicated enthusiasm. But although instructor duty was the norm for these officers during much of the interwar period, it was not their sole concern. They also sought command and staff assignments.

Command of troop units was a desirable assignment for officers during the interwar period because it could result in highly beneficial officer efficiency reports, such as the one Alvan C. Gillem earned in June 1925. Gillem's regimental commander remarked that "Major Gillem is the best Battalion Commander I have ever known. [He] understands how to handle and instruct his men and officers, [is] dependable and loyal."<sup>37</sup> Prior to World War II, Gillem commanded an infantry battalion for two years, an infantry regiment for ten months, an armored brigade in 1941, and an armored division for ten months before and shortly after Pearl Harbor.

Twenty-two of the thirty-four officers gained extensive command experience during the interwar period. As their experience grew, they

34. Price, *Middleton*, 94.

35. Edward H. Brooks, Military Personnel Records Jacket, NPRC.

36. Russell Frank Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, enlarged ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 599.

37. Efficiency Report prepared by Colonel Woodson Hocker, 3 August 1925, Nogales, Arizona, in Alvan C. Gillem, Military Personnel Records Jacket, NPRC.



usually led successively larger units, moving from company to battalion to regiment. Nine commanded only one or two units between the wars. Only three did not command troops at all between the wars. Of these, Huebner and Middleton had already had extensive command experience during World War I. Bradley was solely on instructor and staff duty the entire interwar period.<sup>38</sup>

All thirty-four officers held staff assignments during the interwar period, varying from regimental staff duty to service on the General Staff in Washington where twenty of the future corps commanders served. Often, these staff assignments were long tours of duty lasting from three to five years. John R. Hodge spent five years with the Operations and Training Division, G-3, of the War Department General Staff. Walton Walker was a member of the Supply and Projects Section and executive officer of the War Plans Division from 1937 to 1941. Omar Bradley served on the General Staff in Washington from June 1938 to February 1941.

At the beginning of World War II, the thirty-four officers who would become corps commanders were exceptionally well prepared for the challenges of high-level command in modern warfare. By December 1941, most were colonels holding key assignments. Their professional education and extensive experience as instructors, commanders, and staff officers made them ready for high-level command as the nation prepared to deploy large ground combat forces. Several factors led to selection of our thirty-four subjects for high-level command in World War II. Age was, of course, a major factor; most successful candidates for high command were in their late forties or early fifties at the outbreak of the war. They had extensive education and experience and an aptitude for tactical thought. They also had records of continued success in a variety of assignments between 1939 and 1942.<sup>39</sup>

However, performance of duty was not always sufficient for attainment of high-level command. A favorable reputation with George C. Marshall, army chief of staff; Leslie J. McNair, chief of Army Ground Forces; and later Dwight D. Eisenhower was also an important factor in command selection. There was a personal connection between these three officers and twenty-one of the thirty-four corps commanders. General Marshall viewed "the selection of officers for high command as one of our most complicated and important duties and one which will

38. Military Personnel Records Jackets, NPRC; and Cullum, *Biographical Register*.

39. Ibid. For a discussion of factors leading to high command positions in the U.S. Army in World War II, see Blumenson and Stokesbury, *Masters of the Art of Command*, 4.

have to be approached directly." In a memorandum on this subject dated December 1, 1942, to General McNair, Marshall emphasized that "vital qualifications for a general officer are leadership, force, and vigor. Ordinary training, experience, and education cannot compensate for these and the officers who possess them must be singled out and advanced regardless of other considerations."<sup>40</sup> Marshall adhered to this policy. While he considered the recommendations of his G-1 personnel officer, General Headquarters, and area commanders, he personally made the initial command assignments.<sup>41</sup>

Marshall looked for corps commanders among "men who have proven themselves very able in organizing and training divisions."<sup>42</sup> Oscar Griswold, George S. Patton, Jr., and Innis Swift commanded divisions in the United States before World War II. The other officers in this study first commanded divisions, either in training or in combat, during World War II and then rose to assume corps commands. Clearly, successful division command in the U.S. training base or in combat was the essential prerequisite for corps command. As the number of divisions in combat expanded during the war, they became the training grounds for future corps commanders. After June 1944, officer promotions that were deserved on account of assignment to high command were deferred pending the test of battle.<sup>43</sup> In the European Theater of Operations, General Eisenhower decided which generals should be promoted from division to corps command, and he personally approved those corps commanders nominated by Marshall and McNair.<sup>44</sup> In the Pacific, General MacArthur approved all corps commander appointments, with General Marshall's recommendations. MacArthur's army

40. Marshall Memorandum for McNair, 1 December 1942, microfilm of Marshall files in the National Archives, George C. Marshall Research Library, Lexington, Virginia.

41. Mark Skinner Watson, *Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations*, U.S. Army in World War II (Washington: GPO, 1950), 274-76.

42. Marshall to Major General Walter S. Grant, 7 July 1941, in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, vol. 2, "We Cannot Delay," July 1, 1939-December 6, 1941, ed. Larry I. Bland, Sharon R. Ritenour, and Clarence E. Wunderlin, Jr. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 561.

43. Lieutenant General Lesley J. McNair, Memorandum for the Chief of Staff, Subject: Corps and Division Commanders, 27 June 1944, Box 427, Records of the General Staff, U.S. War Department, Record Group 165, National Archives. (Such record groups hereafter cited as RG with record number.)

44. Stephen E. Ambrose, *Supreme Commander: The War Years of General Dwight D. Eisenhower* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 597. Also see Memorandum and Messages on Corps and Division Command Appointments, 25 September 1944, RG 165, Box 7, Records of the Executive Office, Operations Division.

commanders also recommended to him those division commanders capable of corps command.<sup>45</sup>

The average age of officers upon assuming corps command during the war was fifty-three,<sup>46</sup> though it tended to be slightly older in the Pacific.<sup>47</sup> The oldest corps commander, Innis P. Swift, was sixty-two when he commanded First Corps in the Pacific in 1944. J. Lawton Collins, commander of Seventh Corps in the European Theater, was, at forty-seven, the youngest. (See Table 3 for commands held.)

Once corps commanders entered combat, they usually remained in command of the same corps unless relieved or promoted to command of a field army. Seven corps commanders were relieved during World War II. Medical problems were the sole cause for two reliefs and played a part in two others. Lack of an aggressive advance of forces was the principal reason for the other reliefs. The first to be relieved of command was Lloyd R. Fredendall in North Africa in March 1943. In the battle of Kasserine Pass, his troop dispositions were faulty, and when surprised by the enemy, he failed to exert the type of leadership that could have prevented an embarrassing defeat. His subordinate commanders and his superiors all concurred with his relief.<sup>48</sup>

In September 1943, General Mark Clark relieved Ernest J. Dawley from command of Sixth Corps after the battle of the Salerno beachhead. According to an authoritative history of the campaign, "the inevitable confusion of the beachhead, the intermingling of units and the consequent lack of neat dispositions on a situation map, Dawley's failure to impress visiting officers of high rank, his fatigue after several days and nights of strenuous activity and little sleep—these raised doubts in

45. Marshall to MacArthur, 7 July 1942, Records of the U.S. Army Pacific, U.S. War Department, Record Group 4; and Walter Kreuger to MacArthur, 2 July 1944, Papers of Lieutenant General Richard K. Sutherland, Record Group 30; both items at the MacArthur Memorial Library and Archives, Norfolk, Virginia.

46. My calculations show an average age of 53.23 years on assuming corps command. The files of the General Officer Management Office, U.S. Adjutant General's Office, the Pentagon, show the average age of corps commanders in the European Theater of Operations in 1944 as 53 years and 3 months. The General Staff kept track of the average ages of World War II general officers.

47. The Pacific corps commanders were Robert L. Eichelberger, Oscar Griswold, Charles P. Hall, John R. Hodge, Alexander M. Patch, Franklin C. Sibert, and Innis P. Swift.

48. A brief account of the relief based on the opinions of Eisenhower, Harmon, and Truscott is Jones, "Lloyd Ralston Fredendall," 350-53.

the minds of his superiors."<sup>49</sup> Ironically, Fredendall was promoted to lieutenant general after his relief, while Dawley reverted to his permanent rank of colonel. Fredendall's promotion had been initiated prior to his relief and Eisenhower and Marshall believed he could still serve the war effort.<sup>50</sup> For the remainder of World War II Fredendall was commanding general of the Second Army with headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee.

Mark Clark was also instrumental in relieving John P. Lucas from Sixth Corps at Anzio in February 1944. Clark relieved Lucas without prejudice. He felt Lucas was worn out and could have been more aggressive.<sup>51</sup> Lucas retained his rank and returned to the states to command training armies.

Major General Gilbert R. Cook, who led Twelfth Corps in the drive to the Seine after the breakout in Normandy, was relieved in August 1944 at his own request on account of "the increasingly painful effects of a circulatory disease which kept him from moving about the way he thought he should . . . to meet his own high standards of command."<sup>52</sup> General Charles H. Corlett had health problems brought on by service in the Pacific early in the war and an infection contracted in Normandy. Corlett was relieved of command of Nineteenth Corps in October 1944 during the Aachen campaign. While his relief was done without prejudice, the army commander, General Courtney Hodges, was dissatisfied with his corps' progress against the fortifications of the Westwall.<sup>53</sup>

General Hodges, commander of the First Army, was also unhappy with the way Major General John Millikin handled the situation at the

49. Martin Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, U.S. Army in World War II (Washington: GPO, 1969), 152. Dawley returned to the United States and served as commanding general of the Tank Destroyer Center from March 1944 to March 1945. Ernest J. Dawley, Military Personnel Records Jacket, NPRC.

50. See Eisenhower to Marshall, March 5, 1943, No. 4580, RG 337, document number 740112.

51. Martin Blumenson, "General Lucas at Anzio," in *Command Decisions*, ed. Kent Roberts Greenfield (Washington: GPO, 1960), 323-50.

52. P. Wood, "Gilbert Richard Cook," obituary, *Assembly* 25 (Spring 1966): 86-87. Also see Martin Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, U.S. Army in World War II (Washington: GPO, 1961), 565-68. George S. Patton, Cook's army commander, rated him number one of the ten unbattle-trying corps commanders known to him in June 1944. Gilbert R. Cook, Efficiency Report prepared by General Patton, Military Personnel Records Jacket, NPRC.

53. Russell Frank Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 129-30, 630-32, 755.

Table 3

## U.S. Army World War II Combat Corps Commanders

Name	Birth Date	Command(s)	Theater
Anderson, John B.	10 Mar 91	XVI Corps, Jan 44	ETO
Bradley, Omar N.	12 Feb 93	II Corps, Apr 43-Sep 43	North Africa Sicily
Brooks, Edward H.	25 Apr 93	VI Corps, Oct 44	ETO
Collins, J. Lawton	1 May 96	VII Corps, Feb 44	ETO
Cook, Gilbert R.	30 Dec 89	XII Corps, Nov 43-Aug 44	ETO
Corlett, Charles H.	31 Jul 89	XIX Corps, Mar-Nov 44	ETO
Crittenberger, Willis D.	2 Dec 90	IV Corps, Mar 44	Italy
Dawley, Ernest J.	17 Feb 86	VI Corps, Apr 42-Sep 43	Italy
Eddy, Manton S.	16 May 92	XII Corps, Aug 44-Apr 45	ETO
Eichelberger, Robert L.	9 Mar 86	I Corps, Aug 42-Aug 44	Pacific
Fredendall, Lloyd R.	28 Dec 83	II Corps, Oct 42-Mar 43	North Africa
Gerow, Leonard T.	13 Jul 88	V Corps, Jul 43-Jan 45	ETO
Gillem, Alvan C.	8 Aug 88	XIII Corps, Dec 43	ETO
Griswold, Oscar	22 Oct 86	XIV Corps, Apr 43	Pacific
Haislip, Wade H.	9 Jul 89	XV Corps, Feb 43	ETO
Hall, Charles P.	12 Dec 86	XI Corps, Oct 42 (deployed June 44)	Pacific
Harmon, Ernest N.	26 Feb 94	XXII Corps, Jan 45	ETO

Table 3 (continued)

## U.S. Army World War II Combat Corps Commanders

Name	Birth Date	Command(s)	Theater
Hodge, John R.	12 Jun 93	XXIV Corps, Jun 43	Pacific
Huebner, Clarence R.	24 Nov 88	V Corps, Jan 45	ETO
Irwin, S. LeRoy	23 Mar 93	XII Corps, Apr 45	ETO
Keyes, Geoffrey	30 Oct 88	II Corps	ETO
Lucas, John P.	14 Jan 90	VI Corps, Sep 43-Feb 44	Italy
McLain, Raymond S.	4 Apr 90	XIX Corps, Nov 44	ETO
Middleton, Troy H.	12 Oct 89	VIII Corps, Mar 44	ETO
Milburn, Frank W.	11 Jan 92	XXI Corps, Dec 43	ETO
Millikin, John	7 Jan 88	III Corps, Oct 43-Mar 45	ETO
Patch, Alexander M.	23 Nov 89	XIV Corps Jan 43-Apr 43	Pacific
Patton, George S., Jr.	11 Nov 85	I Armored Corps Jan 43	North Africa
		II Corps, Mar 43-Apr 43	North Africa
Ridgway, Matthew B.	3 Mar 95	XVIII Airborne Corps, Aug 44	ETO
Sibert, Franklin C.	3 Jan 91	X Corps, Aug 44	Pacific
Swift, Innis P.	7 Feb 82	I Corps, Aug 44	Pacific
Truscott, Lucian K., Jr.	9 Jan 95	VI Corps Feb 44-Oct 44	Italy
Van Fleet, James A.	19 Mar 92	XXIII Corps, Feb 45-Mar 45	ETO
		III Corps, Mar 45	ETO
Walker, Walton H.	3 Dec 89	XX Corps, Sep 42	ETO

Remagen bridge and the bridgehead, and so he ordered his relief on 17 March 1945—just prior to the collapse of the bridge. Within a month, Millikin assumed command of a division whose commander had been seriously wounded.<sup>54</sup> The final relief of a corps commander occurred in April 1945; with victory in sight, Manton S. Eddy left command of Twelfth Corps on the orders of medical officers alarmed by his high blood pressure.<sup>55</sup>

Besides being relieved, corps commanders could leave their posts by being promoted to higher command. Four corps commanders—Bradley, Eichelberger, Patton, and Truscott—received army commands during World War II. In a famous memo prepared by General Eisenhower in February 1945, he listed officers in order of merit based on the value of services rendered in the war.<sup>56</sup> Bradley heads the list; Patton is fourth. Eighth, ninth, and tenth are Gerow, Collins, and Patch. Eisenhower describes Collins as a “particularly fine C.G. in a battle; energetic, always optimistic, a leader.” Also included on Eisenhower’s list are Ridgway, Brooks, Haislip (described as a “Fine Corps C.G., fighter, cool”), Eddy, Huebner, Harmon, and Van Fleet. The list not only provides Eisenhower’s assessment but almost serves as a roster of senior commanders in the postwar army. Bradley, Collins, and Ridgway were all army chiefs of staff; Haislip was army vice chief of staff. Ridgway and Van Fleet commanded U.S. forces in Korea. Conversely by 1948, sixteen of the thirty-four corps commanders had retired from active duty.

The thirty-four combat corps commanders contributed directly to the Allied victory. Their professional military education, experience in a variety of positions, and operational knowledge combined with combat leadership prepared them to serve the army ably at war.

54. Charles B. MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, U.S. Army in World War II (Washington: GPO, 1973), 222–35, 367. Millikin, previously highly rated by Patton, formally objected to an unsatisfactory rating given him after his relief on 7 May 1945 by Courtney Hodges, commander of the U.S. First Army. Millikin affirmed that, “under the existing conditions my actions taken on the ground were justified in the light of successful results.” Bradley noted on the efficiency report that Millikin’s successor, General Van Fleet, “was better qualified to command the corps than General Millikin with his limited experience.” Bradley added that Millikin’s record should not be adversely affected by his relief. Bradley to Commanding General, European Theater of Operations, 26 June 1945, in John Millikin, Military Personnel Records Jacket, NPRC.

55. Manton S. Eddy, Military Personnel Records Jacket, NPRC.

56. Dwight David Eisenhower, Document No. 2271, “Memo, Eisenhower Mss., Butcher Diary, February 1, 1945,” *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years*, ed. Alfred D. Chandler, et al. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970– ), 4:2466–69.

After the war, one corps commander, Ernest N. Harmon, addressed the issue of war and peace. He wrote:

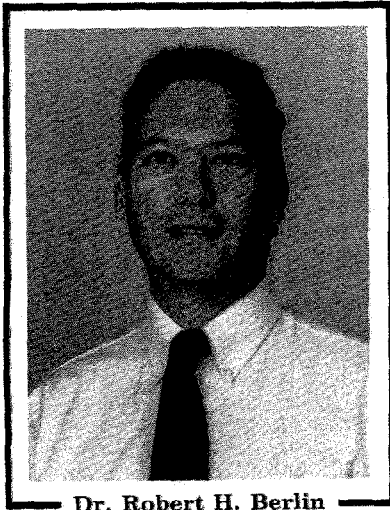
As a professional soldier, I have always been one of the true advocates of peace, because I realize perhaps more than any other class of people the terrific waste, misery and expenditure of war. I assure you, there is nothing pretty about it, except the great spirit of sacrifice and comradeship that is developed by the men who have the dirty business to do.<sup>57</sup>

Lengthy professional preparation involving extensive education, training, and command experience during peacetime is required to prepare a mature corps commander. The often unrecognized efforts of U.S. Army combat corps commanders in World War II merit historical attention, for such leaders do not simply just appear when the dirty business of war begins.

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57. Harmon to Mr. E. G. Davis, undated letter, Ernest N. Harmon Papers, USAMHI.





— Dr. Robert H. Berlin —

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